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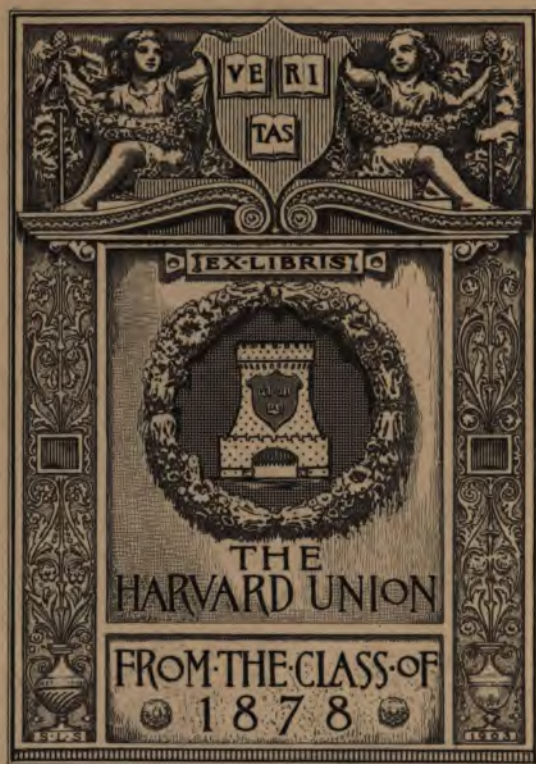
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ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON  
A STUDY BY A.B. WITH A PRE-  
LUDE & A POSTLUDE BY L.I.G.

*Alice Brown*



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TO  
WILLIAM ERNEST HENLEY



“AND WHENSOEVER THOU IT UPPE DOST TAKE,  
DOE PLUCK IT SOFTLIE, FOR THAT SHEPHEARD’S SAKE.”





❧ A VALEDICTION ❧

**D**AYS are drooping, thought is dumb,  
Crept into a cave;  
Winter terrors thickly come  
On the haunted wave:  
Light and delight have left

What in their stead,  
Since the nations kneel about the bravely fallen head?

Black the deadly clouds o'errush  
All our heaven in him,  
Power in many a boreal flush,  
Play of starry whim.  
Ere the king reed is cut,  
Ere the full strain,  
Lo, the fickle faun is gone; the woods are bare again.

Who her truant to the North  
Chiding, can restore?  
Which of cities, leaning forth,  
Touch him as before?  
Where serried Cant effrays  
Art, as of old,  
Nevermore aloft that loved oriflamme of gold.

Would that he might yet delay  
While the onset lowers,  
Would he had not borne away  
Ardor his and ours!  
O song upon the march  
Elsewhither blown!  
The battle-dread is on us now, riding afield alone.

Though in sorrow and unrest,  
Scotland searching free  
Find no steward of the Best  
Bountiful as he,  
Nor arms of Scottish dead  
Fold him, exiled,  
With the wilder, gentler, he so gentle and so wild;

And asunder from his own  
Though Samoa keep  
Him uplifted to her throne  
Of pellucid sleep,  
Winds that across the world  
Ride the sea-swell,  
Sign him with the tears of home, the chrism of farewell.

Was it menace from the dark,  
Was it body's fret,  
Early taught a patient barque  
Cruises sadder yet?  
Or but some primal urge  
Greatly obeyed,  
Drew to the unfriended hearts the heart of mercy made?

Where from water's blue outpost  
Lonely Beauty calls,  
Calls, and down the glowing coast  
Felt denial falls;  
Where tern above the cloud  
Trooping, have heard  
From the Prince of Welcomes by, no glad saluting word;

Where the slanted glens unbar  
Boldly to the gale,  
And aromas, loosed afar,  
Kiss the trader's sail;  
Where over lava-fire  
Dances the vine,  
For a symbol perfected, thy sepulchre and shrine!

Memory like a rainbow stair  
Painted on the morn,  
Dearest name that on a prayer  
Christianly is borne,  
Soon to romance exhaled,  
Linger and live:  
Meed no purer unto man the childlike men can give.

Still the islands good to seek  
Rule in wonted mode;  
Vaea's bright surf-belted peak  
Still be thine abode!  
Grief of her loyal race  
Time shall retrieve,  
And all in airy legendry thy shining spirit weave.

To the bathers' wonder, oft  
As the night is nigh,  
And to babes beneath the soft  
Wings of lullaby,  
(While we of dull unfaith,  
Thrall to our sighs,  
Dual dream to quicken thee and us may not devise),

There on summer's holy hills  
In illumined calms,  
Smile of TUSITALA thrills  
Thro' a thousand palms;  
There in a rapture breaks  
Dawn on the seas,  
When TUSITALA from his shoon unbinds the Pleiades.

#### A STUDY

**W**HEN one who has lived among us goes voyaging, leaving us to the impoverished solitude of a darker night, a cloudier day, we can but set in order the poor lendings he has cast aside. He may have gone to sail a wider sea, with promise of return; and then we solace the failing heart with hope. Or, as it happens hourly on this insecure island whence many are rescued, in strange haste, by ships

that touch before we hail them, and are gone, he may have been snatched forever from the circled rock where he had made what shift he might to build himself a house, and stint his hunger on the wilding root. Then it is that we fold the poor husks of his habiting with solemn care, and a yearning sense of love unspent. This was his book, and this the flower he tended; here stays his glove, still rounded to the wrist and palm. Strange it should yield the grasp no warming thrill! Poor trifles these, until he made them into monuments of grief; small, sacred relics, to be touched only by his dearest, and held for them henceforward in some casket, transfigured by their presence to a shrine. Thus it is in the inner orbit when love parts from love; but if the man has lived an artist, a true maker, then are we all heirs of the body of his thought. We have each the sacred right to muse and brood over our sad possession, finding it, whatever its magnificence, all too poor to echo what is gone. Yesterday Stevenson was ours; to-day the too-secure present has rebuked itself in solemn denial, and, in the noble phrasing of an elder speech: *He is not.*

Yesterday it was a commonplace of criticism to name him the greatest living master of English style, sharing the unvexed throne with Ruskin only. To-day has brought the hour for pondering over our treasures, and bethinking ourselves wherein their beauty lay, that thereby our gratitude and worship may increase. We cannot go too far; such keen espial will only point the way by beauty led, and unveil plenitude of fair device.

We know his life in part, its outer form and circumstance. Smilingly reminiscent, he gave us, briefly but generously, a biography of the only sort that really concerns us; such as touched upon his work and the creed to which he set his days. He was inevitably confidential, personal, intimate; life was so bewildering, so rich! How should he, a curious child, standing with eye to crevice, fail to call out, in wonder and delight: "I see! I hear! O listen, look with me!" So much he gave us, of his own good-will, and we claim no right to more. If the friend of his heart, or those leal comrades to whom his soul spoke with uplifted visor, unravel some of his mystery, we are rich indeed; but failing that, such as we saw him "in his habit as he lived," — what was he? Earliest of all, a child compact of strange differences, so cunningly woven that the world appealed to him on a hundred sides, and yet could not o'erthrow him. The channels running toward that quickening soul were many and free; they

brought innumerable vivifying influences to which lesser men are strangers; they were the avenues of innumerable sickening fears. For though Nature play the fairy, loving and lavish in gifts, she keeps the sphynxlike impartiality of her common mien. She denies no effect, be the cause legitimate. If the key fit the lock, the door opens, though to Death himself; and when she fashions a soul so sensitive that the winds of heaven evoke from it a happy harmony, she does not deny it the shrieking discord of "blasts from hell." Yet the child must have had an unwonted balance of will and temperance of judgment, since the conflicting strains of his nature wove themselves into a texture so fine and warm. For his ethic bent, he looks shrewdly back to his grandfather, the old divine. "Even as I write the phrase, he moves in my blood, and whispers words to me, and sits efficient in the very knot and centre of my being." As that gentle scholar walked the eighteenth century, — strange, bewildering thought! some part of Robert Louis to-be, walked with him, and nestled in his heart; and in Robert Louis, the writer, the old divine still acted after his mortal part had long been dust.

From Thomas Stevenson, his father, the child undoubtedly drew a royal disregard of the practical difficulties of life; he breathed the spirit of one who battles with the sea. This Thomas Stevenson was also, though in less measure than his radiant son, compact of opposites. The sternness and melancholy of the north lived in him, not quite at peace with the vivacity of the south; "shrewd and childish, passionately attached, passionately prejudiced, a man of many extremes, many faults of temper, and no very stable foothold for himself among life's troubles," a generous citizen, and a fastidious lover of fitting words. He was one in a close-knit line of beacon-builders, and it would be strange if hereditary virtue were not engendered by such unbroken warfare against wind and wave. Men of other homely occupations helped to found this princely lineage, and it was possibly theirs to generate in the child his love and understanding of the honest tasking that lies near the earth. Still more remote (but many a league removed from that oldest ancestor of all, Probably Arboreal, on whom he casts a whimsy look), it is inevitable to conclude that some gypsy strain sent down to him its craving for the wild and free. But this of his inheritance only so far as it affected his work; of the man himself, known in a measure through his books, something later. (And with him, as with all, patently as dew is water, the style is the man.)

The boy Louis was a dreamer, the lord and subject of good, heady dreams, colored brighter than the darling prints of that early playtime, gayer than mortal "crimson lake (hark to the sound of it — crimson lake! — the horns of elf-land are not richer on the ear) — with crimson lake and Prussian blue and a certain purple. . . . Titian could not equal." There were dreams to sell, in those days; and in that market, little Louis bought "two-pence colored" every time. No more fascinating self-betrayal shall be found, though you seek it in all literature, than his Chapter on Dreams; not so much for the worth of knowing how Doctor Jekyll and Mr. Hyde were born from nightmare chaos and Olaila's hideous destiny took form in sleep, as that it lights up the very tissue of that throbbing brain, flamingly alive in boy and man. At first and often, the dreams were like pure sensation, simple as a line upon a slate: "a certain hue of brown," of which the child had inconceivable horror and loathing at night, though none whatever by day, or a personal torture wrought from the two traceable experiences of urgent school tasks and the dread of death and judgment. But these tricky phantoms of the night soon became embodied; they lived, and put their feet to action. His setting forth to sleep, like that of his father, was to the accompaniment of imagined stories, straight-way to be acted on the stage of dreams by his little people, his Brownies. Vividly active sprites, they were the mimes and jesters of his nightly court; but all the pretty poetry of their existence sank into prose when their master and task-fellow began to spin webs for the public eye. Thenceforth they ran in harness, and knew the road to market. Every hint of their blazonry speaks such a continuous pageant of mental joy and action as makes our richest day seem poor. Scotland's skies are gray, but the warm little theatre of one boy's brain glowed brighter than her heather; here were glancing swords, and beating hoofs, and here heroic action of the wars. He put a girdle round the earth; he lived in Spain.

Poor mortals, most of us trail through fagging hours, and then lie down to dullard lethargy, or formless, uncouth visions at the best; here was a creature divinely endowed to sap the very veins of life all day, and view her mimic counterpart by night, not untired, it is true, but tossed, like Fortune's shuttlecock, from peak to peak. Unripe, as yet, for dull academies, he was the pupil of sense; before he could be taught to know, Nature, the handmaid of God, fed his hungry capacity, and made him feel.

And so was the growing soul inured to its great and unsuspected destiny.

The outer facts of his life are prettily diverse and briefly told. Suffice it to know that he was born, a Scot, in 1850, and that he loafed and lived at the University of Edinburgh; that he was predestined to engineering, and when he elected to follow the profession of letters, was released from his rougher task and pushed into the law; that, "aye writin', aye writin'," he gently and insistently refrained from practicing this imposed profession; that he spent years in search of a sky under which he might barely live, and that he died at Samoa, in an enforced content, a ruler of hearts among the island people, Tusitala, the story-teller, and their virtual king. The rest, or its alphabet, shall be read backwards from the mirror of his work. ✓

No autobiography was ever more quaintly dressed in a true simplicity than Robert Louis Stevenson's confession to the gaping public of the method whereby he learned to write; a straightforward narrative, quite devoid of implication that his anvil's fire was lighted from the sun. Ignore with him his nearness to the one Source of spark and heat, and view him as he stands, hammer in hand, strong in determination to become a cunning artificer of words. How did he do it? So far as the tyro reads, by common means and dull, throwing heavy testimony on the side of the ill-emphasized platitude that genius is only the capacity for taking infinite pains. He kept pencil and paper by him, and wrote continuously, seeking form and form only, and serving an apprenticeship vastly like his own presentment of the artist life at Fontainebleau. For (as he says of the young fraternity who herd together there, spending breathless passion on studies destined never to be pictures) to the crude student, form is rightly everything, and matter merely a feather-weight. He but learns to use his tools, scrupling not to work in the manner of other men, and making palpable imitation the basis of true art. ✓

What student among the few who have bowed their backs to toil, has had Stevenson's coolness of purpose, his acquiescence in results? For though the ordinary prentice may set his hand to the mastery of form, knowing his own crass ignorance, yet, with the fatuity of youth, he half expects to find the outcome pregnant of wonder. He believes much in the divinity of chance. Surely the giant oak must lie in seeds engendered by so hot a sun! You could no more surprise him with the news



that some crude page of his had set the world a-praising than you could kill his hope by crushing it, an empty husk. And all the time he is telling himself Keats died at twenty-six, and maunding over Chatterton, not so much that he was "marvellous," but marvellous and a boy. Stevenson was not altogether untouched by this malady of youth, this green-sickness of authorship; but it passed him lightly by. He is palpably the clearest-minded of men, and there is no reason for doubting either his interpretation or his memory in the statement that he deliberately sat down to write for the satisfaction of the deed, and that, when his manuscript was refused or mercilessly condemned, he acquiesced in the fiat without rancor and without surprise. For a time, he was merely an echo of the fuller voices, the trained, canorous quiring of the great. In the school of art, he grew up a man of many loves, and these he names frankly, with grateful homage, content to acknowledge their influence from an originality so vital that all might strengthen it, and none impair it.

That he should so unconcernedly have borne testimony to this self-imposed schooling is eminently well for us who come after him; especially for those who, born with a noteworthy aptitude, are misled into cruel use of it by a mistaken idea of the sanctity of carelessness, the plenary force of inspiration. With a naïve belief in the sacredness of power, such fear to meddle with their trust, as they were the children of Israel and their treasure the Tables of Stone. But this man, an acknowledged sovereign over vast accomplishment, demonstrates, in his own proper person, that literature is an art to be learned; and that, as the painter may not disdain mastership from the few who sit in state within the inner chamber, and as the musician finds his way through pains to harmony, so the man of letters shall by no means advance by a certain divine hit-or-miss progress, like a beetle bungling toward the light.

Perhaps the enormous egotism of youth infected this master workman only in those early days when, a prey to sickness and the thought of death, he wasted the hours over his *Voces Fidelium* with a yearning desire for their permanence when he should be no more; a straining belief that they might bear testimony for him after he had fallen into dust. But here, also, wise, fostering chances came to his rescue, and restrained him to healthier courses, before yet he saw clearly enough to exercise a free choice and save himself. It is curious indeed to dream on the possible career of one so starved by divers gifts,—child of the

sun and yet the victim of earthly languor — and guess what he might have become under less robust conditions. What if he had drifted into the student's ways, with arduous hours in libraries, under the spell of memory and the past! But now his father's profession claimed him, like a heartening wind over great stretches of plain, bringing ever the salt smack of the health-renewing sea. In place of moping over Greek roots, or galloping with English rhythm, he was drinking into that thirsty mind of his tales of great onslaughts valiantly withstood, the warfare of wave on masonry, perennial strife between the old, old craft of building and the force of tide and storm. He travelled with his father from point to point along the coast; he met the wind face to face; he lingered upon docks, and his heart rose to the spreading canvas, and tracked the beneficent wonder-birds of commerce, until they dipped below the horizon and were lost in dreams. The boy must have done a deal of voyaging then, almost as much as his mind effected by night. Homekeeping was not for him, and he knew it early and followed his fancy late. Here lies a word of his own testimony, vivid and conclusive, filling the gap of supposition: —

“It [his education as an engineer] takes a man into the open air; it keeps him hanging about harbour-sides, which is the richest form of idling; it carries him to wild islands; it gives him a taste of the genial dangers of the sea; it supplies him with dexterities to exercise; it makes demands upon his ingenuity; it will go far to cure him of any taste (if ever he had one) for the miserable life of cities. And when it has done so, it carries him back and shuts him in an office! From the roaring skerry and the wet thwart of the tossing boat, he passes to the stool and desk; and with a memory full of ships, and seas, and perilous headlands, and the shining pharos, he must apply his long-sighted eyes to the petty niceties of drawing, or measure his inaccurate mind with several pages of consecutive figures. He is a wise youth, to be sure, who can balance one part of genuine life against two parts of drudgery between four walls, and for the sake of the one, manfully accept the other.”

Every word touching his university career moves the mind to gratitude that he was not too far misled upon the beaten routes of fact, and had, according to his own tale, the insolent bravery to remain a careless student. For, from the first, and still in growing measure, life was more to him than books; his course was ever a deflection from the cut-and-dried programmes of

preparation to the secret places of joy, where unseen ministers lurked, to watch and tend him. But even if he could confess, in humorous retrospect, that "no one ever played the truant with more deliberate care, and none ever had more certificates for less education," the University vouchsafed him something better than the accumulated wisdom of a hundred text-books; that "ruddy drop of manly blood" transfused from friendship's veins to make the heart throb quicker and more ardently. There he fell across Fleeming Jenkin, Professor of Engineering, a nature rare among thousands. To read Stevenson's own Memoir of Jenkin is to learn how potently, how humanly, lay upon him the spell of that high and striving spirit. Indeed, the book is more than the portrait of "a good man of most dear memory"; it is a lucid interpretation of Stevenson's own point of view in biography, and of the qualities he chiefly loved. To him, Jenkin was an acknowledged leader; not, however, to be implicitly followed, for there were times when he enforced a tactless judgment, and left his pupil bruised and bleeding. Such error was inevitable in one of Jenkin's calibre: a man of extremes, for many years of his life, until experience had moulded him, brusque in speech, rash in opinion, a hot-headed champion, always ready for the fray, and holding the foreign ground of a quickly-conceived argument as if it were his immemorial freehold; yet so truly humble, so tractable through the affections, so honestly worshipful of the right, that his very existence sang like an appeal straight to the honor-loving heart. His simplicity of purpose, his chivalry of feeling must have strengthened daily in Stevenson that fine fibre born of gentleness, and his heroic ideals heartened the lad anew for the arduous warfare of the opening world; in equal measure, must his reverence for workmanship have confirmed every nascent desire of a flawless technique.

Jenkin delighted in the Greeks, their obedience to proportion and absolute beauty. He was a student of the drama, and held red-hot opinions on the artificial requirements of the stage and the exigent art of acting. He reduced the principles of blank verse to involved laws of rhythm, betokening keen study and a delicate ear. Such fervor of speculation could do no less than set the younger man's mind to throbbing anew over the quest of hidden springs of harmony in prose and verse, and unravelling the web that hangs about the chamber of all æsthetic delight.

To know one man who has chosen conscientious workman-

ship for the religion of his life, is a liberal education; to imbibe the atmosphere of a nation tacitly sworn to such worship, is to "hitch your wagon to a star," and fall in with the harmonious order of creation, moving, though slowly, toward loveliness and truth. Among the formative influences on Stevenson's mind, who shall overestimate the spirit of France? His vivid, breathing picture of student life at Fontainebleau is a bold black-and-white, struck off in some moment of happy inspiration, of the *Wanderjahr* of youth. There in the Forest linger, for a happy interlude, the chosen people, dreaming, learning, scaling heaven with desire; the moment of youth once passed, and their happy prenticeship over, they flit away into the rasping world, to fill the Salon, and starve in garrets, or brighten the walls of Croesus' gallery. That clear sky, the dark, rich forest, the romance of the scene! these fire the soul, while the sweet content of days spent in the toil more restful than any idleness, fosters a new birth, a happy influx of vital force.

The artist fraternity thrive, as in natal air, amid the hour's bright voluptuousness, the gay comradeship, the charm of kindred pursuits; and the literary man in their midst, though he give himself over utterly to the delights of pure Bohemian living, is transfigured into an eager spirit, instinct with fiery desires and great imaginings. He is prepared for action by the fever of futile dreams; colossal visions paint themselves on his brain, and though they fail and fade, the memory of their burning there has touched the tissue of his mind forever to finer action. More pregnant still, he has imbibed that "something, in the very air of France that communicates the love of style. Precision, clarity, the cleanly and crafty employment of material, a grace in the handling, apart from any value in the thought, seem to be acquired by the mere residence; or if not acquired, become at least the more appreciated. The air of Paris is alive with this technical inspiration. And to leave that airy city, and awake next day upon the borders of the forest, is but to change externals. The same spirit of dexterity and finish breathes from the long alleys and the lofty groves, from the wildernesses that are still pretty in their confusion, and the great plain that contrives to be decorative in its emptiness."

If Stevenson needed to be hewn into shape, to be polished, trimmed, and made to fit the groove run by eternal verities, he must have had that happy discipline during ever so short a stay among the traditions of the one nation of workmen. He

could not have failed to imbibe from the Gallic spirit that which comes nearest its informing religion, the "passion for perfection," and to learn anew what so rich a nature is ever slow in grasping, the harmony of a just proportion, the beauty of restraint.

A man who is a reader of many books, yet in whom the critical faculty lies dead or dormant, owned once, in a burst of surprise at the concensus of opinion among English-lovers, that for his own poor part, he had never given a thought to Stevenson's style. "For," said he, "it is perfectly simple." That seemed to me the topmost leaf of praise, except that I should amend it by a word and call it *almost* perfectly simple. Sometimes it becomes entirely so, and then you see the true, inverted image, art mirroring the world. Again, though rarely, you shall guess out some patient chiselling whereby the gem was cut, and even if the sun strike from it now a ray like light itself, you remember the serious pains, the tentative shiftings of that foregone process and marvel more than you enjoy. But the time was coming, if this mortal base of things had not failed beneath his feet, when he would have used his pen, at every unerring stroke, like another hand, in large unconsciousness; when words would have fitted themselves to thought like angels' song to heavenly lyre, in succession so harmonious that no one note could be imagined otherwise. "For," says Clough, "poetry, like science, has its final precision; and there are expressions of poetic knowledge which can no more be rewritten than can the elements of geometry. There are pieces of poetic language which, try as men will, they will simply have to recur to, and confess that it has been done before them." Art is living and her precedents are ever forming. As age on age has laid the pillars of the earth, so day by day has built the pinnacles of thought above her air, and given them permanence. A few are born with authority to catch the fleeting influence of the hour, and bind it in imperishable form; Stevenson was one. At his best, he made the phrases hereafter to be used and treasured, but never made again. And the greatest was to come. True, he was ever the master, large in expedient, learned in device, but an art developing as his would inevitably have developed to the last, under a sway so potent, must in the end have become altogether plastic. "I would fain be to the Eternal Goodness what his own hand is to a man," is the aspiring cry from the old Theologia Germanica. So, reverently be it said, would

have become the spiritual marrying of this man and his art, had time, and time alone, fostered their gradual union. In that happy future, he must have grown so unconscious of his manner of saying that he could have said all to us without reserve; we might have been trusted with his inner thoughts, the daring and the delicate. Giving thus unconstrainedly, the act would have had the largeness and divinity of the gifts of love, perfect only when self is unremembered. But to guess what might have been had we followed the spirit further who hung entranced upon its shorter way, is to quarrel with the sunrise. Such as we knew him, he was like none other; temperate in the midst of fantasy; a serenely-smiling landscape, though played upon by all the lights of heaven; full of a happy humor, yet persistent in remaining untouched by bitterness; alive to the ironies of life, yet never dabbling wantonly in its cruelty; a master of ornament, but the priest of simplicity; and above all, so diverse in gifts that his work might easily have become beauty run mad, had not his passion for the true bound it within her happy trammeling.

In his own Essay on Style, he deprecates the shrinking of the many who would never, of themselves, resolve a finished work into its ultimate elements. He hesitates before disclosing the scene-painter's art to a man who would otherwise swear he looked upon real trees in the forest of Arden. He shrewdly suspects the existence among the unlearned of those who will look down upon the happy device of a quick eye and a practised hand as the tricks of the trade; but nevertheless he throws open the workshop, knowing how gladly the true artist will step within, to muse, and ponder, and revere the more, while the uncritical multitude but stare and mouth, and go away to spill their spleen. To apply to his own work the very method of analysis employed in this same essay, and unravel where he wove, is to meet beauty face to face, a snow-crystal far more entrancing underneath the lens than in its floating vagueness and entirety. He is, above all, a master of directness enriched by diversity. He tells a story with the unpretending vividness of an eye-witness, the while he draws upon that priceless gift of illuminating the barest fact with light that, for the untaught eye, was never yet on sea or land, and adds a glory to the heavens themselves, by true interpretation of their countenance. Read certain of his simplest pages and you feel the mind expand, as one should hear a sculptor's exposition of the human form, and thenceforth

view that fairest temple with a finer insight, a purer love. Nature is not inadequate, conned thus at second-hand; taught by a master to observe, you begin to see her through poetic eyes, and so, at last, to see her truly.

In a mind so bountiful, what crowding imagery must have risen at every breath! Fancies must have clothed themselves, at the outset, in drapery too rich and heavy for the common wear. / Life was, indeed, for him, a procession clad in purple. Such prodigality, be it said again, might easily have "o'erleaped itself" and marched through volumes in fantastic motley. But no! even at the height of vital emotion, he is ever austere and temperate. / He never forgets the just proportions of life though won upon by all the uttermost joys of the universe. See what he says of the commonest phenomena, embalming the fleeting glory of a moment in immemorial phrase:

"All the gold had withered out of the sky." (Do we keep the twilight image so?)

"I have never seen such a night. It seemed to throw calumny in the teeth of all the painters that ever dabbled in starlight. The sky itself was of a ruddy, powerful, nameless, changing color, dark and glossy like a serpent's back. The stars, by innumerable millions, stuck boldly forth like lamps. The Milky Way was bright, like a moonlit cloud; half heaven seemed Milky Way. The great luminaries shone each more clearly than a winter's moon. Their light was dyed with every sort of color—red, like fire; blue, like steel; green, like the tracks of sunset; and so sharply did each stand forth in its own lustre that there was no appearance of that flat, star-spangled arch we know so well in pictures, but all the hollow of heaven was one chaos of contesting luminaries— a hurly-burly of stars. Against this the hills and rugged tree-tops stood out redly dark."

"The waves which lap so quietly about the jetties of Monterey grow louder and larger in the distance; you can see the breakers leaping high and white by day; at night, the outline of the shore is traced in transparent silver by the moonlight and the flying foam; and from all round, even in quiet weather, the low, distant, thrilling roar of the Pacific hangs over the coast and the adjacent country like smoke above a battle."

"The wind huddled the trees. The golden specks of autumn in the birches tossed shiveringly. Overhead, the sky was full of strings and shreds of vapour, flying, vanishing, reappearing, and

turning about an axis like tumblers, as the wind hounded them through heaven."

"The wind had veered more to the north, and no longer reached me in the glen; but as I was going on with my preparations, it drove a white cloud very swiftly over the hill-top; and looking up, I was surprised to see the cloud dyed with gold. In these high regions of the air, the sun was already shining as at noon. If only the clouds travelled high enough, we should see the same thing all night long. For it is always daylight in the fields of space."

All the more primitive devices of sounds and their combination were open to his hand. Alliteration, that delicate-handed slave but most barbaric master, served him with a deftness so perfect you hardly guessed her to be there. The recurrent beat of sound allured him, even in its crudest form, and one who knows even slightly the texture of the Stevenson mind, will guess his lasting kinship with the state of feeling described in his own humorous anecdote of the Philosophical Society before which one curious lad propounded the ingenious problem:

"What would be the result of putting a pound of potassium in a pot of porter?" "I should think there would be a number of interesting bi-products," said a smatterer at my elbow; but for me the tale itself has a bi-product, and stands as a type of much that is most human. For this inquirer, who conceived himself to burn with a zeal entirely chemical, was really immersed in a design of a quite different nature; unconsciously to his own recently-breeched intelligence, he was engaged in literature. Putting, pound, potassium, pot, porter; initial p, mediant t—that was his idea, poor little boy!"

So did Emerson forget the play before him, when one phrase, "the glimpses of the moon," withdrew him to another field more germane to his mind; and Stevenson, though not to be misled through tracts of emptiness by "jingling words," pricked up his ears at their summoning, like a dozing hound who hears, afar, the hunter's horn. Yet so skilful is his use of this device that, in his absolutely fortunate passages, you never note it. You only know that the words have a melodious succession, sound following sound in measured diversity, like twisted gold and silver in a braid. In his verse, it becomes, of course, more apparent, notably and inevitably in the Child's Garden, where, with a nice appreciation of the primitive form due to childish themes, he allows himself a measured cadence, and constant recurrence of sound.



He has a true and delicate ear for rhythm, that haunting quality born to send one sentence lilting along in darting swallow-flights, another in measured curves like the crow "to the rooky wood," and the next with eagle-sweep to the mountain-tops. This is forever a question of ear. It is taught in no academy nor is necessarily to be apprehended by the master of a system. If you have it not, you have it not, and there's an end on't; no diligence shall amend your lack. Stevenson had it.

"From time to time, a warm wind rustled down the valley, and set all the chestnuts dangling their bunches of foliage and fruit. The ear was filled with whispering music, and the shadows danced in tune."

"It was a long look forward; the future summoned me as with trumpet calls, it warned me back as with a voice of weeping and beseeching; and I thrilled and trembled on the brink of life, like a childish bather on the beach."

"Such was his tenderness for others, such his instinct of fine courtesy and pride, that of that impure passion of remorse he never breathed a syllable. Even regret was rare with him, and pointed with a jest."

"We had a shower or two, but light and flying. The air was clean and sweet among all these green fields and green things growing."

"The spring green brightens in the wood, or the field grows black under a moving ploughshare."

And this is the moment for remembering that such love of lilting progress never beguiled him into letting his work become a shade more (and therefore less) than honest prose. For that haunting, teasing quality of certain picturesque narrative, for that bastard writing so falsely ambitious as to mislead the mind, from moment to moment, into an uneasy sense of measured lines, an irritated desire for their perfecting, he had no patience. A too-poetical prose, it is safe to guess, would have repelled him more than prosaic verse carefully constructed and honestly meant.

He had an inborn delight in names for their own sake, quite independent of their association and birth. As Southey cherished the scheme of planting his Pantisocracy on the banks of the Susquehanna because the river's name chimed happily with his thought, and as many of us hold the nightingale the closer-wedded to music for the fall of her three melodious syllables, so is it ever with him. One of his paragraphs especially so feeds

the appetite for empty sound that I have to rehearse it, not because I have walked by Allan Water or know the voice of the trickling of Allermuir, but because it richly ministers to love of melody alone.

“But the streams of Scotland are incomparable in themselves — or I am only the more Scottish to suppose so — and their sound and colour dwell forever in the memory. How often and willingly do I not look again in fancy on Tummel, or Manor, or the talking Airdle, or Dee swirling in its Lynn; on the bright burn of Kinnaird, or the golden burn that pours and sulks in the den behind Kingussie! I think shame to leave out one of these enchantresses, but the list would grow too long if I remembered all; only I may not forget Allan Water, nor birch-wetting Rogie, nor yet Almond; nor, for all its pollutions, that water of Leith of the many and well-named mills — Bell’s Mills, and Canon Mills, and Silver Mills; nor Redford Burn of pleasant memories; nor yet, for all its smallness, that nameless trickle that springs in the green bosom of Allermuir, and is fed from Halkerside with a perennial teacupful, and threads the moss under the Shearer’s Knowe, and makes one pool there, overhung by a rock, where I loved to sit and make bad verses, and is then kidnapped in its infancy by subterranean pipes for the service of the sea-beholding city in the plain.”

Yet, caressing words for their comeliness, he was never betrayed into the maze of empty sound; the universe meant too much to him. Being, to his mind, was ever more than singing, and a golden sunrise put even ringing periods to scorn.

Inseparable from his mastery over rhythm, stands his manipulation of the perfect sequence of phrase and sentence, the fortunate close. As in music, a transposed measure yearns back to the keynote, for which the ear has been longing, though unconsciously, all the while, so will his periods settle gently to earth, and let the mind breathe and recover, before the lark begins again. But here, also, he avoids the snare of ending too often on a one-syllabled word, a beguiling device calculated, when run too far, to make pseudo-poetry out of prose. You come upon one such restful drop and conclusion and then another; but just as the spying mind cries out in triumph at having discovered a method (like seeing the rabbit go into the hat), the magician turns coolly about, and does it another way. Now he closes with two syllables, and again with three, lest simplicity become hide-bound, without the unexpected and diverse. Yet not all

this nicety is a conscious taking thought for the sentence, O learner of a master's art! He needs not to say, "Here is barrenness clamoring for the enrichment of diversity; so to't with another syllable!" Nay, any more than your musician, at his improvising, shall murmur, "The first, third and fifth," in striking the perfect chord; he simply feels out the higher harmony through a divine instinct perfected by happy use.

Down to the barest bones of language, his mastery holds. With that large carelessness so deluding to the onlooker, he steers merrily past the ordinary pitfalls of composition, and you grow light-hearted in his company, fancying none are there. So does he control and almost efface the relative pronoun, apt always to obtrude its presence, like mastic oozing through a loosely-laid mosaic. He is chary enough of the present participle, effective in the piling-up of rhetorical periods, but too unwieldy for his dainty and delicate purposes.

Everywhere shall you come upon the same considered workmanship, though differing in splendor. Poetry can scarce rise higher than the Panlike eloquence of *Virginibus Puerisque*, and when you follow him afield, you shall find the earth and heaven illuminated with touch on touch of incommunicable art. The humor of the world, the rare witchery of its human phases, the splendor of a star, the fine remoteness of a donkey's graver moods, — he knows the very word of words to paint the true complexion of appearances; the word, and how to link it to its fellows. If any arise capable of censuring his style, I believe it will be in large and never in little. Scarcely a sentence can be found unsatisfying, but the linked phrasing of paragraphs does not always measure our desire. The parts are exquisite, but at moments they do not cohere with the strength of stone. The mind is sometimes, though briefly, drawn off the scent. Instead of counting four at his periods, you count five, or, it may be, seven, while you think. One sentence does not grip its neighbor with hooks of steel, and so on through the argument. They are like priceless gems unset, like flowers but loosely garlanded. Thus an essay is destined to live in the memory, not as an imperishable form, but a series of beautiful successions. Is this, as one asserts, because, like Emerson, he had no formulated theory of life? I believe it is more, or rather less than that; it seems also to refer itself to causes less abstract and more mechanical. In his tendency toward picturesque statement, he ignored dialectic for poetic beauty of phrase. He was less anxious to

convince than to state harmoniously, and he loved each sentence with an individual love, turning and polishing until it waxed in delicate strength and asserted itself bodily and valiantly. Thus you forget the forest for the trees; you look and wonder, brooding over each, its curious growth and beauty. Yet when all is said, the most captious must own himself humbled if he turn to The Lantern Bearers, and to Pulvis et Umbra, compact and perfect worlds thrown off to spin through space, in tracks of beauty laid from farthest time. Old Mortality, also, holds a passage of prose so harmonious and perfect as forever to defy criticism. Possibly it remains for the man of single purpose to build up arguments; the rhapsodist, to whom life calls in many voices, will scarce pursue his path save by lines bending where fancy draws him. Here in our doubtful day lived the sprite turned philosopher, and praised be all the fostering gods! he dared express himself as nature bade.

It is difficult to regard his critical work studiously, save with a wandering eye, drawn momentarily away from the canvas to the artist himself. (And thus it is ever with Stevenson. You go to seek a book; you find—a man. You strive to estimate his championship of beauty, and straightway it pales and loses lustre beside his contribution to the code of life. For, in his eyes, even literature is a small matter beside the march of shining deeds, and, seen in the light of action, the rounded circle of the arts forms but an added means by which we really live to look on a beautiful face, or a day in June.) It is impossible to overpraise his temperance in judging another; his dignity, as that of a gentleman among his fellows. The preface to that rich library of criticism, the Familiar Studies of Men and Books, is almost strenuous in its desire of speaking with justice, almost pathetic in its beautiful humility. (This business of ticketing souls becomes a ticklish one. He knows it, our wise Scot!) But, if you think he cringes, or falters, or balks at a strong opinion, you have not read him truly. He can thrust as well as another, but only under the rules of the game. He must have his quarrel just. And ever, as the mind reverts to the man Stevenson, behind the mask of authority, inevitably weighing what he does by constant reference to what he is, it finds him the catholic soul, and so, as heat and light are one, in equal measure the soul of love. Carefully he chooses his point of view, sure always to be on the hither side of mercy; but when the time does come for swords, he wields a righteous blade. How he probes to the quick the poor vanity of

Burns's gangrened sensuality, casting aside, like a flimsy rag, the spurious romance that would hide the sore! He has no word dark enough for the pity of that battle lost, the youthful armor scarred, the pennon dragging in the mire, fit only now to wrap a courtesan. Yet when he has illumined every dint in that marred honor, and bade you remember how mercilessly clear is heaven's light, be the sinner poet, ploughman or king, he hesitates; not to withdraw a line, but to bid himself be gentle in his thought. Burns's moral frivolity, his unhealthful dallying in the pathway of decay and loss, offend him bitterly; but he pauses to own not only his profound compassion for this poor victim of a will diseased, but to confess himself penetrated to the soul by the man's desperate efforts to do right.

Stevenson had too keen a sense of humor to accord Walt Whitman an undivided homage. He wraps him in clouded praise, but straightway he fears lest he may not have shown his true worship for so good a man, one whom defective art could never altogether condemn since he lived and saw the glory of life. For Thoreau, he owns a divided love, warmly responsive to a maker of English like that carved out in Concord woods, crowning a philosophy at times so remote and rarefied; still he confesses to a noble impatience of the man who enchains him, judging him to have been a skulker, a creature content to keep warm and shielded in withdrawal from his kind, preserving that delicate health of the soul which is more sickly than disease. For Charles of Orleans, the clever craftsman at a verse, the undecided and inactive in the clamoring affairs of life, and for Villon, the radically unchaste of soul, he disdains no healthy thrust; but with each, "God made him," he concludes, "therefore let him pass for a man."

Surely a more diverse company was never got together by reviewer's drum and fife! But motley as they are, and some of them all undeserving, in different measure he takes them to his heart. Even when his pen strikes on evil deeds, he still keeps the attitude that is nowhere better described than in Loudon Dodd's summary of his own "unconsenting fondness" for Captain Nares. "The faults were all embraced in a more generous view. I saw them in their place, like discords in a musical progression; and accepted them and found them picturesque, as we accept and admire, in the habitable face of nature, the smoky head of the volcano or the pernicious thicket of the swamp."

Here is Hugo the Great, entrancing the warm-blooded critic

through his romanticism ; Yoshida-Torajiro, the martyr-hero, who threw his life, doubtless longing for a greater than life for one cast more, into a losing, — nay, at that time, almost a non-existent cause ; and John Knox, woman's private sympathizer and her public foe. Even Pepys, at whose pose he expresses more surprise than is common with him, he accepts with a certain smiling tolerance ; the frank, voluptuous enjoyment of the man, his candid selfishness, his magnifying touch whereby all the commonest pleasures of life were greatened into large delights, — all this facility in garnering joy for purely private ends, awoke in him an aching sympathy. If Robert Louis Stevenson ever failed in understanding men, it was not because he did not keep his nearness to them ; if he ever struck too deep, it was not because he aimed the blow in wilful blindness or in lack of awe.

He knows such deep truths of the soul and its action as if he had penetrated, for one fearful moment, into the secret arcana where God judges and man has ceased to guess. As life cries to him from a hundred points, so also does humankind. In his sight, the living soul is a thing of reverence and wonder, whatever the deed it blindly did ; whoever shall probe it too daringly, whoever shall wound the face of God in man, "it were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and that he were drowned in the depth of the sea." Is his brother not clear-sighted nor strong of hand, to work a righteous will ? Then what ? But for the grace of God, inexplicable in dealing, places had been reversed, and, "handy, dandy, which is the justice, which is the thief ?" Believing so with all his sober heart, judgment put on the cap of kindliness, and became that heavenly charity we are wont to glorify afar. He is so wise a man, this friend of men ! For he knows also that the soul is ever mute before her adversary, life. She cannot express herself ; still less shall she be understood, and when he stands silent before her, neither quite condemning nor releasing her from blame, he is like the Hindoo who dare not kill, lest he strike the soul of his grandam. For we who live in such fastnesses of ignorance and pain, when we take it upon ourselves to flout another know not what we do. Shall we kick the dog who roils the water, not guessing a prince would bathe there presently ? Shall we curse the blind man who falls against us in the way ? Shall we, who are but motes above this teeming ball of energy, presume to guess the indirection of another mote, spinning as mysteriously at our side ? Nay, he knows better, and thus is he, after Lamb, his master in letters, the most loving among critics, the sparing in abuse, the prodigal of praise. 25

His poetic work is very evidently not his natural utterance. Yet it rings true enough to feed the desire of guessing what it might have been, had the full current of his emotion dashed, foaming yet deep, between the golden cliffs of rhythm and rhyme. To the general eye, the maker has reached his topmost estate when he sets his thought in the mould of ordered verse. Possibly we see it so because we are not yet far from the childhood of the race, delighting in form and pleased by melody's recurrent beat; or it may be the tacit belief that man only partakes in inspiration when he improvises, snatching from every air of heaven new breath to voice his ecstasy. Escaped from self, he nears the greater sea. In such high estimate, the requirements of verse are no rigorous trammels; save as the intervals of the scale make the happy limitations of harmony, or as God has set a measure to the tide. If we, the underlings of letters, find in ourselves but a glowing of the rage for rhyme, we fan it mightily, and work ourselves up, under its "whiff and wind," into a dervish fury. But with Stevenson, great prose was evidently more to be desired than monumental verse; he could write in rhyme, but "he had elsewhere his inheritance." He is master of a true and lucid blank verse (strangely enough, for under Fleeming Jenkin he must have followed such over-refinements of analysis as to paralyze a less buoyant mind, drive the creative sense out of door, and leave invention sitting idle in a barren house), and his rhymed couplets are at times extraordinarily delicate in touch and finish. *The House Beautiful*, inviting to the inner sense as fine frostwork upon glass, has the touch of Emerson in his more dry-adic moods, like horn calling unto echo, while we, poised in our skiff between, listen and wait, scarce knowing which is lovelier. This is the note of the shepherd philosopher who reads the heavens and sees all's well, though his carpeting be of sod, and the stars his only light; this is the wood-spirit, informed and set aflame with all the joy of being. Like Emerson, too, he beholds the vision of evanescent beauty, the rapt, elusive sprite, the happy sequence of joy never quite attained. *The Garden* breathes all the simplicity of an Horatian message; the word of one who loves trifles, finding nothing too small to love. And in verse upon verse, here and everywhere, are the pledges of spiritual kinship, friend calling unto friend, the sprite from his hearthstone sending skoal to James, to Henley, to Katharine de Mattos, to the few among his chosen. The imprint of the human is on them all. How they satisfy the ear, while yet they

seek the heart ! The delicate message to Will H. Low ends in four lines of ever-memorable beauty, giving forth the inevitable ring of great and elemental literature :

“Where hath fleeting beauty led ?  
To the doorway of the dead.  
Life is over, life was gay:  
We have come the primrose way.”

The Celestial Surgeon reiterates his perpetual longing to drink the all of life. “Probe me!” he cries, in challenge of the unknown physician. “If I have not lived, leave not my heart inert, but pierce it deeper, and waken it anew.” Is this a diviner ecstasy of being than the animating spirit of Rabbi Ben Ezra, heretofore the greatest embodiment of a great consent ? With Browning, the potter and his clay ; patience under pain. With Stevenson, not alone the acquiescence of suffering, but the quivering flesh reaching upward to the knife, as Psyche’s lips to Love. All this unpretending verse is sweetened by a rare asceticism. He is not among those who overload the line with ornament, as if a hand should be more than a hand, gaining the barbarism of gems. Still will he “use all gently,” but now and again you come upon some perfect phrase create to haunt the memory:

“For love of lovely words.”

“And from the shore hear inland voices call.”

“You put your frosted wildings forth,  
And on the heath, afar from man,  
A strong and bitter virgin ran.”

Then again springs a spontaneous living verse, like the one born of solitude and stillness among the pines :—

“The bed was made, the room was fit,  
By punctual eve the stars were lit ;  
The air was still, the water ran,  
No need was there for maid or man,  
When we put up, my ass and I,  
At God’s green caravanserai.”

“Sing clearer, Muse ! or evermore be still,  
Sing truer or no longer sing !”



Thus does he pray for lyric health and freshness. But evermore throughout his nicety of word and phrase, sounds the ceaseless aspiration for courage, for heroic doing though the hour be dull. This man needed no silver trumpet to sound the onset; he could have preluded Roncesvalles with a fish-horn. The scope of his longing was vast, but plainly put; it was enough if he proved not unworthy those bygone generations of sea-warders, who set the coast with guardian lights. Three, at least, among his poems need no word of praise: his Requiem, "In the Highlands, in the country places" (that sad reaching for the "hills of home"), and Ticonderoga, a ballad wrought in flame. The Child's Garden of Verse is surely not so much a book for children as for the child who lives, lone and pining, in the secret soul of every one of us. It was transcribed within the very inner circle of childhood, the fairy ring, to recall us who have been pushed outside it through grosser bulk of body (not of soul!) back again to our lost ineffable joys and buried griefs, sweeter now than the triumphs of a later time. "This is the land," we cry. "Here lies it still, the rolling heights, the pleasant ways and darkling waters. Here it is, goblin land, land o' dreams. The towers are standing, unchanged save by thickening ivy-spray; in twilight corners the old-time shadows lurk, far as we have marched from them, this many a year. They could not follow us, for other fears rose up and thrust them from the track, but God be thanked! they stayed for our revisiting." Children themselves (the unfledged beings who bear the name; not we old folks, quite as little, but forced to tilt all day in armor too big, and with weapons too heavy for us!), real children love the high-sounding narrative, beginning "once upon a time," and manipulating nothing less than blood royal; an exaggerated simplicity may enwrap it, but he who would wholly please must give them a picture, possibly not destitute of the grotesque, but always a picture. They will have rose-gardens and magic steeds, and maids with golden, Maeterlinck locks, long enough to make the prince's ladder; but the reminiscent emotion of the Child's Garden is only the commonplace of their little day. They are like the farmer, come to town and confronted by the typical rustic on the stage. Give him ambrosia for festival; not his own honey made by the bees he bought and hived with his own hands! This, however, is a grown folk's poor opinion; the vote of any dozen children may give it the lie. But for us who stray into that garden, and wander up and down its green-laid ways, it would

be difficult to tell how truly we are at home there, how well content. Not many pages read, we stop in sheer delight. "O you darling!" we cry, and whether it is the child Louis we mean, or the child half-forgotten yet still wakeful, in our own dusty past, we know not. At least it is the child of air who played once in such a garden; grown into duller estate, he has plodded away, but, O happy miracle! the wraith of him lives on in that garden forever. Indeed, it is possible to go further and find this no individual journal, but the record of childhood itself; and it thrills the heart piercingly to see the greatness and littleness of the mind new to earth so truly illuminated. Listen to the piping voice: —

"The world is so full of a number of things,  
I am sure we should all be as happy as kings."

Note the vastness of the wonder, the expression falling like a stick through pure impotence of equipment! Ideas hover over him like a cloud, but like a cloud, he may not grasp them; weak of vision, new sights loom up before him portentously beautiful, awful beyond thought, and he, the unpractised of tongue, may not yet paint their seeming. Those two bald lines are a child's version of

"The cloud-capp'd towers, the gorgeous palaces,  
The solemn temples, the great globe itself."

The same awe, the same recognition of majesty! but the poor baby fumbles for expression as doubtless Shakespeare did, finding even his vast words all inadequate for that comprehensive vision.

To play in the Garden with Stevenson is to know him at six years old even a little better than through his later confidence. This was truly a *Wunderkind*, a child of dreams and fantasy. All his visions were hot and sweeping; day by day, with the careless strength of power, he created for himself new worlds to eke out the insufficiency of this one little sphere. Lying in bed, a luxurious Jove, he overlooked "the pleasant land of counterpane," and worked his magic there. What visions had he of ships in fleets, of cities builded by a wish! Here alone did Rome rise in a day, and Carthage sprang aloft unbargained for. The whole world was all too small for his imagining; its farthest bound was like the narrow seas to Francis Drake. In youth,

as in his prime, it was ever "I should like to rise and go." The soul thus early shod itself with purpose, and staff in hand, arose to travel bravely. No choosing of next-door orchards or pleasant fields near-by; nothing will suit him short of Babylon or El Dorado. But alas for childhood's prison-rules, real as the bonds of age! for all adventure ends at bed-time, that "long black passage," and rising is not wholly to see the sunrise, but to lace your shoes. Still, spite of the jealous real, he stayed there as his childish state decreed, and like the Lady in her tower, saw life go by him all imagined, quite unproved. Like her, too, he saw the shadows in the glass; for always the child is wondering "where go the boats?" questioning the "wind a-blowing all day long," brooding over the armies marching in the embers and the burning city crumbling black. He would fain have lived through the summer of the little toy soldier, buried in the garden. (How like the man Louis! Ever the peerer into mystery, the greedy over fairy bread!) But never mind! there are compensations to a *Wunderkind* as to no other, he whose mind is the real kingdom and other worlds but subject provinces; for he can multiply joys to wondrous issues by this same alchemy of the fancy. He, fine-eyed and sharp of ear, knows what realm on realm lie invisible in the common garden-ground, where Uncle Jim, grown-up and dull and knowing no better, smokes his pipe in leaden security, thinking he treads a common earth, dedicate only to the growing of cabbage. The worlds are there and Louis has made them; with a turn of the hand, he can make you more.

When jewels shine so clear, what eye shall choose? Yet if we must own but one, let it be *My Treasures*, too perfect not to be learned and quoted:

"These nuts, that I keep in the back of the nest  
Where all my lead soldiers are lying at rest,  
Were gathered in autumn by nursie and me  
In a wood with a well by the side of the sea.

This whistle we made (and how clearly it sounds!)  
By the side of a field at the end of the grounds.  
Of a branch of a plane, with a knife of my own,  
It was nursie who made it, and nursie alone!

The stone, with the white and the yellow and grey,  
We discovered I cannot tell *how* far away;

And I carried it back although weary and cold,  
For though father denies it, I'm sure it is gold.

But of all of my treasures the last is the king,  
For there's very few children possess such a thing;  
And that is a chisel, both handle and blade,  
Which a man who was really a carpenter made."

Here, clad in honest fustian, is the pathos of a little soul's possessing; so small, so poor, and still so like our own maturer worship of treasure all as vain that the common pain of life blows bitingly in upon us while we read. That not unalloyed content roused within us by the feeble majesty of childhood clutches at the throat; the twinge that is ever the partner of a yearning love comes upon us, prompting the heart to comfort, the arms to open wide. Something of the same piercing quality is in Coventry Patmore's remorseful lines, *The Toys*. But there the pathos, being so palpably "an assault upon the feelings," can be borne; My *Treasures* exists, not that you may spin a moral, but only that you may remember the contentment of youth. 217

Stevenson, the story-teller, is secure of praise. For though ultimate criticism will inevitably point, for his monument, to the essays and descriptive prose, the lover of hearty deeds will still disport his fancy in those charmed pages of adventure. Here was the true romantic, who chose to portray life, not as it is, but as it might be any day in any year; life stuffed full of virile deeds, — sailing the sea, striking great blows and growing lustily thereby. He loved to feed men on the meat of action, to heat their blood red-hot, and move them with the joy and knowledge of being. This was the choice of one who had never lost the child out of his inmost spirit. Not for him was the middle-aged yearning over dreams obscured, like morning stars, by day's full splendor; his eyes saw ever with their early clearness, and the wisdom of his prime spoke nowhere more weightily than in commending a serious attitude toward happy make-believe. "Measure tape all day if you must," runs the tune of his implication, "but at sundown, fall to graver matters, and come out to play. Very possibly you have no ships and islands of your own, but I can spare you one or two. Turn a page, and you find them." Living, as he did, within that sanctuary of divine insight surrounded by the glory-clouds of youth, he saw no reason why as good a game should not be +

played on the open sea or by a rigorous coast, as behind the sofa-backs while the grown folks are battering away at their own dull device of talk. He extended his stage, intensified his motives, and the thing was done. The king of romantics, there was one choice in the world of letters to which his imagination steadily refused to lend itself; though you flayed him, you could not make him understand why, in the land of books, we should deliberately prefer to be dull; nor why, for our amusement, we should repeat the dreary routine of our poor common day, when we might tilt on a Field of the Cloth of Gold, with kings for company, were they but the kings of roguery. He loved "a piece of purple"; he would have it flaunted for sash or banner, though our doublet be of frieze. And all day long, he heard the bird of the ideal, the promiser of joy ineffable, the chorister beside the altar of beauty, singing before him in the darkling woods.

Remembering his comparison of Hugo, Scott and Fielding, you are tempted to set his attainment before the mirroring of that great company, seeking especially the bonds of likeness or difference between him and the two of his own tongue. Fielding, said he, was a creator of men and women warm with the vital action of the soul, and owing no whit of their reality to the accessories of time and place. He saw humanity as the playwright sees it, against a background broadly indicated, suggestive merely of life. His world was governed by individual interests alone; the spirit of the times might cry ever so loudly, but the voice of his puppets struck clearer on the scanty furnishing of his mimic stage. Scott was the exponent of a civilization becoming every day more complex, and he imbibed inevitably that sense of proportion incidental to a larger field; he learned how inextricably individual deeds are interwoven with what we are pleased to call great events merely because we see them in the aggregate. At last it had become somewhat important to the romancer that Scotland should be shaken by war or turmoil, for individual fortunes were thereby discomfited, and M. and N. could no longer love or strive, unconscious of the pother o'er their heads. Thus did the epical hero dwindle to the actor in romance, and thenceforth his deeds were decked out and played upon by a rich profusion of means unsought by the robust chronicler who led the way.

— Stevenson, making deliberate choice between the novel of incident and the novel of character, left the intricacies of human

conduct to such as love a laboratory, and yawn in the open air. He undoubtedly wore his heirship to Scott with all the pride of lineage. It seemed peculiarly the heirship of kin, for each was pure story-teller and Scotland's own. But the prince, become sovereign, extended his realm through valor waxing great, and bestowed upon it a transcending power. Not only inventor but artist to the finest fibre, he carried onsets whither Scott never could have followed, carving deeds with impalpable art where the other hacked and hewed.

If Scott marched a pace in advance of Fielding in the selection of fitting scenery for action, Stevenson was far removed from both. Places were continually appealing to him with suggestions of dead and gone story, or beseeching him to vivify them with deeds. One, the Isle of Earraid, had so insistent a hold on his imagination that it would not leave him at peace, and he might not rid himself of the clamorous ghost by even once laying it in print. There he "put a whole family," and later condemned a shivering hero to exile on its coast, and then he must fain describe it again, with all its cloudy moods and the vague surmises cropping out from it, like weeds upon a ruin. He owns the fascination fixed upon him by rocks engirt with pools on a solitary shore. "What scenes have been enacted there?" he muses. "What deeds are yet to spring?" With art's painstaking nicety, he selects a scene; or, it may be, the scene selects him, and the story wills of its own strength to be written. Conducted thither, you never quarrel with his choice. The solitary, ramshackle estate of Shaws, in *Kidnapped*, the booming of the wave in *Treasure Island*, the rock-begirt isolation in *The Merry Men*, the cosmic loneliness of that dazzling stage where hell defied high heaven in *The Ebb-Tide*, — once there, the narrative seizes hold upon you before its pages are well begun. This is the attitude of the pure romancer, aiming first and always at the air of telling a story as it really was; reproducing the very color of the time, making you hear the rote of the sea as it dinned itself into the hero's ear, and feel how cold, and wet and weariness washed their tints upon his aching flesh. It is the noble, primitive idea of naked narrative; neither rent with analysis nor clouded by moral polemics, but addressed only to the hale fancy of the robust nature within us all, which needs only feeding to live. It is the sole manner of invention made to send a story singing down from father to son, from bard to bard, in the old melodic days.

Like every sensitive, fancy-driven soul, sick to death, at times, of earth's boding and horror, Stevenson has learned every lineament in the face of fear, loathsome twin brother of danger and ministrant to the grave. And as menace is the informing soul of romance, so fear walks beside it, and poisons the very sky with fetid breath. In the more transparent art of common workmen, personal adventures crowd in series, and the narrator retains your ear by piling peril upon peril; but Stevenson craftily heightens the apprehension of the man beset by bodily danger through superadding a secondary fear, born of darkness and the strange places of the earth. That breathless tale, *The Pavilion on the Links*, serves well for sole example of such cunning; for the character of the place, augmenting the emotions of the hour, as in *The Fall of the House of Usher*, goes far toward working the reader into a state of tension rendering the catastrophe a positive relief. "Poison or pistol shot!" we cry. "Only deliver us from the body of this unseen death!"

"The country, I have said, was mixed sand-hills and links; *links* being a Scottish name for sand which has ceased drifting and become more or less solidly covered with turf. The pavilion stood on an even space; a little behind it, the wood began in a hedge of elders huddled together by the wind; in front, a few tumbled sand-hills stood between it and the sea. An outcropping of rock had formed a bastion for the sand, so that there was here a promontory in the coast line between two shallow bays; and just beyond the tides, the rock again cropped out and formed an islet of small dimensions but strikingly designed. The quicksands were of great extent at low water, and had an infamous reputation in the country. On summer days, the outlook was bright and even gladsome; but at sundown in September, with a high wind and a heavy surf rolling in close along the links, the place told of nothing but dead mariners and sea disasters. A ship beating to windward on the horizon, and a huge truncheon of wreck half buried in the sands at my feet, completed the innuendo of the scene. . . . The place had an air of solitude that daunted even a solitary like myself."

That is the phrase, "the innuendo of the scene"! He forces you to hear and taste it, even as it lies upon his own tongue and within his ears; so that when the men step outside into that stillness "unbroken save by the sea-gulls and the surf," and

where a hundred men might have lain upon the sand in ambush, you feel with them their sheer inability to bide the horror of inaction; you yield with them to fear, and in your heart passionately adjure them to rush back under cover before it shall be too late. Suspense, that other handmaid of thrilling narrative, is ever under his thumb, and he holds her secrets inviolable. No sooner do you begin a tale than you are set midway on the track of expectation, destined often to fall into the positive excitement of pure scare, before curiosity comes near to being satisfied. Like his own treasure-seekers, we go on, stumbling and prying, with now and then an assault of alarm, and only draw breath again when the ship is in port, and we, poor mariners! our secret at last in the hand, can sit down and talk it over. Notably in *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, the suspense is preserved and intensified until it becomes actually hysterical. To wait with the narrator while the Thing within goes raging up and down, to wonder what formless birth of darkness it may be, is to slip back into child-land and relive one of those moments when the bogie hides behind the door, fateful and supperless. Indeed, so well has the secret been kept, the while he thrums our tortured nerves, that we are sadly conscious of a downfall at the end; for even a partisan, Stevenson-mad, could scarcely deny that the somewhat material solution of the drug oversteps the bathos of disclosure. But no mention of Jekyll and Hyde shall henceforth be complete without the comment of John Addington Symonds, a familiar bit of criticism set forth in a personal letter, and striking so true an ethical note as virtually to close the subject.

"... I am trembling under the magician's wand of your fancy, and rebelling against it with the scorn of a soul that hates to be contaminated with the mere picture of victorious evil. Our only chance seems to me to be to maintain, against all appearances, that evil can never and in no way be victorious. . . The suicide end of Dr. Jekyll is too commonplace. Dr. Jekyll ought to have given Mr. Hyde up to justice. This would have vindicated the sense of human dignity which is so horribly outraged in your book."

No work of Stevenson's can be so harshly criticised from the artistic side, none so keenly questioned. It startles by its power, it revolts through its crudity. So ought we to see the miry deeps in man, but not in such a fashion, like viscera disclosed by butchery. The fancy labored here; the practised hand shook and



✓ fumbled. One passage only recalls the master at his best, a paragraph so great with the birth of a formless horror that it clamors for remembrance :

✓ "He had now seen the full deformity of that Creature that shared with him some of the phenomena of consciousness, and was co-heir with him to death ; and beyond these links of community, which in themselves made the most poignant part of his distress, he thought of Hyde, for all his energy of life, as of something not only hellish but inorganic. This was the shocking thing ; that the slime of the pit seemed to utter cries and voices ; that the amorphous dust gesticulated and sinned ; that what was dead, and had no shape, should usurp the offices of life. And this again, that the insurgent horror was knit to him ✓ closer than a wife, closer than an eye ; lay caged in his flesh, where he heard it mutter and felt it struggle to be born ; at every hour of weakness, and in the confidence of slumber, prevailed against him, and deposed him out of life."

The secret forming the germ of Olalla and The Merry Men is kept with the same provocative assumption of a secret to keep. "You are in suspense? Well you may be," nods the sage romancer. "There's pippins and cheese to come !" In the case of Treasure Island, it is remotely possible that the veteran reader, the old hand at a yarn, may at once suspect Ben Gunn of having been cast for the part of Deus ex Machina, and only waiting for his cue ; but what wiseacre is prepared for the manner of his errantry ? When the map is delivered over to Long John, few among us are so dull as not to smell an ulterior purpose under such engaging courtesy ; but name it we cannot. Like Silver himself, we are the fool of circumstance, and though with him we approach the fateful spot in baffling surmise of a trick, do we dream of finding the treasure gone ? Not for a moment, and we shout our bravos in an ecstasy unfeigned as our relief. Even Long John himself has his hour for mocking at curiosity, and reveals himself at a blow. Possibly his elaborate cloaking of guileless *bonhomie* should have taught us to find him hollow, like the hillwives, a crust of guilt ; but when Stevenson throws us into a state of hypnotic belief, we go patiently on, led by the nose, ready to see black and white as God made them only when our magician releases us, and not before.

+ In working the element of fear, he depends not only upon natural causes and the great psychical influences transcending them, but upon means so slight yet so craftily chosen as to simu-

late a legitimate trickery. Through touches almost unnoted at the time, a reiterated note like the warning music in melodrama, he wakens you to a nervous expectancy relative to some one person or thing. Long John has all the mysterious horror born of that strange wedding of his suavity of manner and deformity of soul, and you fear him as you do hell-pains; but it is the tapping of his crutch that really daunts you. Listening for it until silence feeds the aching of suspense, when it does actually strike upon the ear you are all agog lest, with the terrible omnipotence of evil, he hobble nimbly out of the book, and appear in awful person. The tapping of the blind man's stick is enough to appall the stoutest heart; and awaiting it with Jim and his mother in the dusk, you are tempted to bid them bask Mr. Stevenson of his purpose, let the story go unfinished, and flee the house, leaving its treasure to pirates or the devil, and us within the sound of Sabbath-bells forever. The veiled leper of *The Black Arrow*, ringing his bell through the forest, on evil bent, is born to terrify us quite as indubitably as Dick and Joan are moved, and that by no means because the text gives us terror as their cue. He is the *pizzicato* of the violins, sounding uncertainty and the supernatural.

The primal motives are strongest, the best stories old as the sun. Nothing can be better than the best, and Stevenson, with the fine impartiality of the great, wasted no time in searching about him for a fictitious originality. He took the strong, simple emotions as he found them, unhewn in immemorial quarries, and wrought them into life. From furthest time there has been no better furnishing discovered for the story of adventure than hidden treasure, family feud, sea-fighting, the shifts of a castaway, the unthinking comradeship of hero and heroine before yet they are "a lover and his lass." But ever old, they emerge from his hands minted anew; his scenes are fresh as to-morrow's sunrise, and the men who move there breathe and walk. An involved character-study has no more legitimate place in the novel of adventure than fine lace upon armor; but character itself strives manfully there. Your hero strikes his true impact upon the mind, but the moving pageant of events simply will not let you sit down to examine his soul-tissues under a glass. For all that, he shows a no less solid bulk in the bright, broad sunshine of his deeds. Bad and good, Stevenson's men are tangible as the earth. Nobody shall henceforth win more true fealty than Jim Hawkins, in very spite of his infirmities; for Jim, with

all his gift of taking fortune at the flood, had a slovenly habit of obedience, and rode serenely over the heads of penalties. To us fogies who cling unreservedly to the traditions of law and order, he would have been gey ill to live wi'. Nevertheless we love him, for that he is a boy, built on the old, old lines adored by other boys since the day when Probably Arboreal began to count the gray hairs on his poll, and tell his tales of a grandfather. He is such a hero as boys themselves might have drawn, though not one of them could have resisted the temptation to multiply his fine qualities and set them all over him like prickles on a burr, destined to hold you while they irritate. Multitudes are bold, but who, bethink you, stands forth so finely fortunate? He had a star, and no book so lucky as to coax him for a stroll into its pages could thenceforth exist without him. He is the living exponent of that belief lying warm at the hearts of all, and carefully concealed, lest we be deposed from our middle-aged eminence, that youth, after all, is the thing; and even its errors turn to the general good.

Long John Silver is real as was Beelzebub to a mediæval mind, and every Luther of us is ready to cast the first ink-bottle. David Balfour, that pawky chiel, had more than a touch of "the shorter catechist"; a clumsy chivalry and little humor, poor laddie! and I fear much that after the sad example of that gallant Barbara Grant, we flout him while we love. How innocently does he lay his harmless foibles bare! Never was autobiography so truly self-betrayal. Said the Lord Advocate, "I have a respect for you, Mr. David, mingled with awe." So have we all!

But Alan Breck! here something leaps in and stays the pen, lest it run to justice and not all to praise. The very glance of him wins the heart at a bound:—

"His eyes were unusually light, and had a kind of dancing madness in them, that was both engaging and charming."

Most vain, most brave, the henchman of that dancing devil in the eye, a boaster of his prowess, a braggart over his left-handed birth, simple as a child in friendship, loyal as a dog, honest, like all true artists, when it came to the supremacy of the pipes; best of all, inspired singer of *The Song of the Sword of Alan*. Curiously complex, yet obviously direct, a product of the Scottish nature and the romance-breeding time, who shall find his equal? Who is not still aggrieved that he enters so charily into the later fortunes of David Balfour?

Enumeration tires over the illuminated list of this warm, thronging company. Sea-captains, diverse in headstrong force, and often enough diverse in crime; Jim Pinkerton, crass product of no age but ours, soldier of financial fortune, abortive millionaire, and yet, spite of his blatant, open-mouthed inadequacy, invincibly attractive; Loudon Dodd's grandfather, that mossy grasshopper piping from among the tombs; Mr. Whish, the most frightful inorganic embodiment of vice, ignorance and blasphemy ever conceived by mind of man; and Attwater, truly religious, truly fanatical, and cruel as death, because he dared relegate to himself the attribute of Almighty God, and judge where judgment faileth. There you have them in little, a sample of the king's gallery.

In one book only does the actual development of character and motive outstrip the movement of plot; that dark drama of fraternal feud, *The Master of Ballantrae*. *Treasure Island* holds the mind entranced like the Ancient Mariner's glittering eye, Kidnapped exhilarates with adventure so pure that there's not a headache in a cask of it; but *The Master* is informed by a human, ethical value to which they never aspire. The *dramatis personæ* might almost be cut down to three, the two brothers and the canny, stupid, brave, cowardly old house-dog of a steward, who tells the tale and depicts himself so excellently in the telling. My lady, though prime motive in the machinery, is none so vivid as the men she sways. A thrilling reality touches the story, in part because it is given out of the mouth of more than one witness, and carefully edited by foot-notes (a device always calculated to give a ring of authenticity), but on higher grounds through the Nemesis of character, growing and swelling into the Nemesis of act.

It is impossible to weigh the book without remembering one stern stricture of Stevenson's in his essay on Burns; approval of the fiat that a virtuous act is not necessarily followed by a fortunate result. The universe is not to be set right by a half-hour's soldering. Burns, in his palsied striving after some compensating good for the evil he sowed and tended, married the woman he had wronged; yet the evil kept on flourishing until it choked his very breath. So in *The Master* a love of strict, apparent justice rebels that the brother who had suffered all things at the hands of his evil genius, until his reason was actually shaken, should perish in the same disaster that overwhelmed the devil who set him beside himself, and was morally responsible for

his deeds. But Stevenson knows how truly poetic justice is the justice of the study, not of God. Certain deeds bring about certain mathematical results; though you be thrown thither, you shall not enter fraternal warfare and escape unsmirched. Though Abel may have scratched you into madness with a poison root, yet if you do the act of Cain, you shall surely die. There are deeds born only to end in doom, and though goodness become evil through no responsibility of its own, since it *is* evil it shall not escape. A house divided against itself shall fall, and even he at whose door the measure of blame lies lightest, shall betake himself to safety in time, lest his flight be vain.

The world "will still be talking" because Stevenson so rigorously excluded women-folk from his tales. Even when he admits them, it is apparently from a species of courtesy, a deference to tradition. One looks to see them humiliatingly conscious that he could have set his scene without their bungling aid. Quite evidently he is a boy who has no mind to play with girls. They are somewhat in the way. He is absorbingly satisfied with games made up of guns and boats, and in such matters girls may not meddle too boldly, lest they unsex them quite. Though love be supremest factor of deeds, he needs it not. He finds dragon-killing sufficiently exhilarating, though Andromeda sit at home, safe at her tambour-frame. But reasons multiply; suggestions grow in clouds. He is too critically wise not to realize that when his puppets do up their hair and put on petticoats, the wires work rustily. The Lady of Ballantrae is pure feminine as Lady Esmond, patient and uncomplaining, but she is an abstract of virtue and not its living body. Joanna Sedley's sole touch of nature lies in that one frank outburst when she repudiates her boy's clothes because they did not fit, and Otto's Princess belongs rather to the romance of fairydom than the courts of this civilized world. Catriona does, at times, promise to show herself a real girl, warmly human when she creeps under your plaidie, and with much heroic mettle in her; but even she's scarce "remembered on warm and cold days." Only Barbara Grant quite rouses the heart, but she is no more than a gallant lad born for the Forest of Arden or some merry outlawry, "chasing the red deer and following the roe." No, it is useless to turn the fact, or mouth it in the telling; from that rich and magic scrip of his, the gods omitted the one little key to the feminine heart. Possibly he fails to emulate Meredith's portraiture, because he lacks Meredith's partisanship. The feminine spirit, fostering, intuit-

tive in sympathy, draws and holds him; he dreams of womanly comradeship, even in wood-solitude, its welcome at his journey's end; but the very complexity of the nature for whose rich dowry he longed, might, when it came to portrayal, have warded away his own too-similar spirit. Praise becomes golden when crowning a manly man with the highest attributes among those broadly classified as feminine; as the tenderest woman becomes all the rarer having drunk in manly virtues. When each partakes of the other's best, then are both nearer God's image than any creature yet conceived. Stevenson had all the complexity of make-up ordinarily accorded womankind, her special lustre superadded to his own birthright of courage, honor and truth; and in style, plot, character-drawing, even in formulated religion, he took refuge, through the attraction of difference, in the simple and the free. Moreover, woman is not only complex, but she is more artificial than man, more closely fettered by the restraints of traditionary law. More dramatic than he, she not only becomes what nature made her, and what she would fain make herself, but also what man expects her to be. But Stevenson loved to paint souls that live near the heart of things, and who, bad or good, are governed, not by acquired morality but by the great primal springs of action. He had no space for her who veers and tacks with wandering breezes; his ship must sail straight on under the sweeping wind of elemental passion though to the gulf beneath.

Who ever threw his gold about so lavishly, or cast his spell abroad and gilded all he touched? Was there ever such errant flitting from wood to vale, over the fence and back again? Sometimes, when the eye roves over the entire field of his achievement, his art seems tentative, the quicksilver brain not yet decided whither to run, the hand unfettered by devotion to one form. Heaven-tongued essayist, poet and playwright, the prodigal soul yet spent itself most lavishly in many-hued romance. And what a range is there! For this man, who knew the road to wild adventure, could set down the pure unreality of that sylvan visioning, Prince Otto; the haunting prose idyl, Will o' the Mill; those modern floutings of probability, *The New Arabian Nights*, with their excellent hocus-pocus; the farcical joking of *The Wrong Box*; the ethical beauty of *Markheim*; the crystalized horror of *Thrawn Janet*, and to step outside romance, the terse, humane appeal in the Footnote to History, and the vitriol etching of the letter to the Reverend Doctor Hyde. The Letter has a double value. In that swift rebuking, he takes up arms

for another and in the act again reveals himself. His justice spits a scornful concession, yet is it justice still. Father Damien was dirty; he owns it. But, oh, sacred ministry of love! to-day, "there is not a clean cup or towel in the Bishop-Home, but dirty Damien washed it." These pages, overrun by the fire of scorching justice, still are burning, and will burn; they only need one commentary, — Stevenson's own conclusion to his interpretation of Christ's teaching to accept and pardon all: "But when another's face is buffeted, perhaps a little of the lion will become us best." And still remains the delicate, sweetly-whimsical Travels with a Donkey, and that treasury of English, Across the Plains, full of life and light and color, and sternly uncomplaining as a soldier's journal. Verily, all art is one, the service of truth and beauty; and the man imbued with her great spirit shall penetrate her many gates.

According to Stevenson's own confession, the Brownies who set his scene and acted the dramas he afterwards elaborated for print, were absolutely unmoral, and he was obliged to put in the morality, "such as it is." But very little is put in, and that of the simplest sort; black and white, not grays. Let it be understood that he who reads the novels without reference to the essays and descriptive prose does not know the temper of Stevenson, the man, and will be apt to call him a cool-blooded pagan, not sneering at evil, but holding to a deadly indifference. But read with such fine commentary, you see him what he is, the impartial chronicler, looking with large clear gaze on all the creatures God has made, selecting such as fit his scene, and assembling them there, neither extenuating nor setting down aught in malice. Such as they are, they are. It is his business to write novels, not sermons. Only if you be of those who find their sermons on the roadway of life, you may read them here, though they shall neither be intoned for you nor blazoned upon the wall. No man save Thomas Hardy equals him in this candid photography, and with Hardy it is impossible not to suspect at times the cynic smile. Stevenson remains ever the serious, faithful scribe, the man who shrinks from judgment and walks in compassion.

Now, in the hidden ways of life, the moods and longings of that inner sanctuary where the soul sitteth alone, what manner of man was this who lived among us, the uncomplaining target of fate, and joy's chief ministrant? First of all, a gypsy, with errant longings all keyed to the tune of "Over the Hills and Far

Away," a heart fixed upon the pleasures of the road. A tree sets him tingling with delight, and he is never done describing a river. The living and growing are brothers of one birth with him, and breathing their air, he waxes strong and mounts into ampler regions of being. A wood he finds entrancing; he adores its dignified seclusion, its way of seeking the heart of life through its rich existence of boughs in the air we never inhabit, and the untracked wandering of the roots. Bounded in place, yet free in twig and filament, drinking from a hundred springs never tapped by man, a tree is strangely akin to him, for he, too, felt the check of mortality, and yet grew into the light and spread his leafage there. But perhaps running water pleased him best, with its vital relations to a diversified life, its dreamy wanderings and hurrying plunge into the strange salt sea. His delight was in praising the Oise, whether, in the Golden Valley, it fed fat pasture-lands where kine browsed and patient, dull little donkeys came to lip the happy flood; or where, nearer the sea, it caught at the banks and dragged them down with swirling might, and then (grown greater) forgot the old familiar idyl upon its shores, and gave itself up to the giant egotism of trade. At the start, in that canoeing progress, he was like a merry spirit visited by those clear-voiced birds, the wandering bells, by wood-scents and good earth breezes; at its close, he paddled mechanically, alive only to sense, with all the thinking faculties in abeyance. He was very near the heart of being, near as an oak tree or a springing fern, and with little trouble, he could speed him there again; for one free hour inspires him with ecstasy, and a night out of doors, under the hollow heaven, reconstructs his youth. Urged thus by gypsy longings, he is fired with a perpetual discontent, not because of life itself, but life as we have agreed to make it. Our asinine conventions turn him sick, but his medicine is the sort that all may borrow; give him

" — A Loaf of Bread beneath the Bough,  
A Flask of Wine, a Book of Verse— "

"a winding road, and three hours' march to dinner," and he asks no odds of emperors. And such choosing bespeaks, louder than trump can tell, his true sanity of soul. Out-door air revivifies like the water of life, and to know it is to take hold on truth; without it, men are become — but let Stevenson phrase it: "Without fresh air, you only require a bad heart, and a remarkable command of the Queen's English to become such another



as Dean Swift; a kind of leering, human goat, leaping and wagging your scut on mountains of offence."

The essays, beyond all consideration of their jewelled phrasing, belong not so truly to his art as to his gospel of deeds. Every man's life is a daily *Credo*; with the author, every word. Here was one whose foes lived within his very citadel, his mortal habitation a ramshackle palace where destroying winds swept ever, unvisited by airs of calm. Yet the indomitable spirit dwelt there like some doomed Ravenswood, sworn to keep his former state; or as a princely soul vowed, since death must come, to await him serene and royal as the invading horde found the Roman Fathers, dressed in their robes of price and throned on ivory chairs. Did ever man shut in so frail a tenement so bravely simulate the deeds of health? This was a creature fitted for joy, and since Joy fled him, save at those rare moments when he slept beneath the trees and made his tent the open sky, he was fain to take that sterner mistress to his arms, and wed himself to Courage. We believe too little now in the miracle of soul-sufficiency; we deify the flesh, and coming into life ill-equipped, we whimper when we do not curse. But for him, necessity was laid upon him; he came hither to dominate, though in the midst of carnage.

It is easy to conclude that one other strong soul, besides the woman who loved him, stood by him, soldierlike, and heartened him for war. What he owed the half-dozen friends whose names are familiar on his tongue, as well as what he gave them, we can partly guess; but something deeper clings about the man who, from the circle of ghastly dreams and red experiences, could formulate the greatest pagan cry of modern years:

" Out of the night that covers me,  
Black as the pit from pole to pole  
I thank whatever gods may be  
For my unconquerable soul."

We know, of inmost necessity, that such a soul, in Stevenson's long and losing battle of the flesh, must have been one with him in the valor pledged to withstand the shock and onset of the day.

What did Stevenson believe? So simple a system of morals was never more simply set forth. To owe no man anything, paying scot as you go; to consider your neighbor's happiness; to live cleanly and honest; to do no scamp work; to sing loud at your task, and

moan, if you must, under cover; and above all, *to obey*: the creed of the soldier and the gentleman. To him, life was evidently, in the noblest sense, a great game of make-believe, the heroic blazonry of the captain who stands unblenching on the bridge, knowing the fire smoulders below, and inwardly sworn to ward off panic till the hour of help. It is impossible to believe that a creature so exquisitely organized as Robert Louis Stevenson was not sore beset by the nightmare horrors of life; the shapeless fears that rise at our side and clutch at us with impotent though terrifying hands. But with knapsack on his back, he marched with jocund step straight through this shadowy valley, his eyes ever seeking, though no star lit up the dark, his purpose fixed in noble acquiescence on that unseen goal whither we all are thrust although we choose it not. Some of us go stumbling, pushed neck and crop into the unknown; he walked erect and proud, singing the song of joyance as he strode. In the light of such persistent cheer, *Pulvis et Umbra*, the one dark confession of his life, girds us anew for the fray. For through its very gloom, he proves himself a man like as we are, a man who shrank and then trod firmer yet. No such picture exists of world-making and destruction, of the things that breed and die, of hand to hand conflict doomed always to end in dissolution. The strangeness of it all, and stranger still that man should strive! That he should live even spasmodically for others, should struggle to be cleanly, make laws, forego delight! Seen in despairing mood, the whole scheme becomes a hideous, swarming phantasm of life, breaking every instant into rotting death. Then having made that most tragic avowal, he can add:

“Let it be enough for faith that the whole creation groans in mortal frailty, strives with unconquerable constancy; *surely not all in vain.*”

It is a shallow hopefulness that would escape the vision of decay. “If life be hard for such resolute and pious spirits, it is harder still for us, had we the wit to understand it.” But though we join the cry of lamentation, we must in honor swell the response of hope. That Stevenson could hold up his head and troll his careless ditties to the sun, after that *Miserere* of the soul, opens the mind like a flower to the possibilities of human regnancy. One man has looked hell in the face and stayed undaunted. One man has peered over the gulf where suns are swinging and unmade stars light up the dusk, and yet retained the happy sanity of our common life. He returned

from his Tartarean journey lifting to the unseen heaven the great, glad cry of ultimate obedience. Therefore will we not despair, nor wish one thorn the less had sprung before his feet. We are the stronger for his pain; his long conflict helps to make our calm. For very shame, we dare not skulk nor loiter now; and whither Stevenson has gone, there do we in our poor, halting fashion seek the way.

## POSTLUDE

WHEN FROM THE VISTA OF THE BOOK I SHRINK,  
FROM LAUDED PENS THAT EARN IGNOBLE WAGE  
BEGGETTING NOTHING JOYOUS, NOTHING SAGE,  
NOR KEEP WITH SHAKESPEARE'S USE ONE GOLDEN LINK;  
WHEN HEAVILY MY SANGUINE SPIRITS SINK  
TO READ TOO PLAIN ON EACH IMPOSTOR PAGE  
ONLY OF KINGS THE BROKEN LINEAGE,  
WELL FOR MY PEACE IF THEN ON THEE I THINK,  
LOUIS, OUR PRIEST OF LETTERS AND OUR KNIGHT  
WITH WHOSE FAMILIAR BALDRIC HOPE IS GIRT,  
FROM WHOSE YOUNG HANDS SHE BEARS THE GRAIL AWAY:  
ALL GLAD, ALL GREAT! TRUER BECAUSE THOU WERT  
I AM AND MUST BE, AND IN THY KNOWN LIGHT  
GO DOWN TO DUST, CONTENT WITH THIS MY DAY.

*Sicut luna perfecta in aeternum et testis in coelo fidelis.*

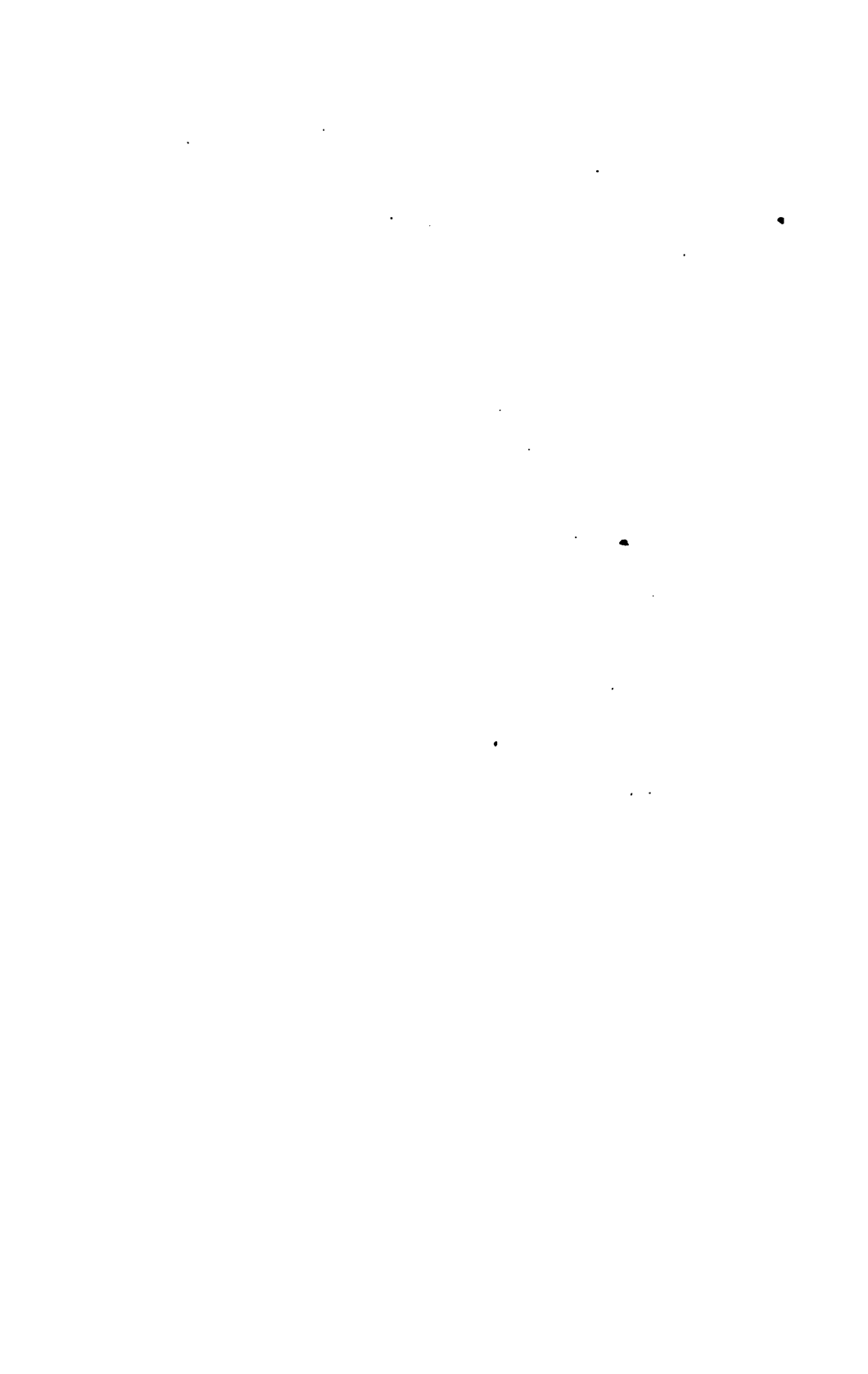


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